

December 2001

MILITARY PERSONNEL

First-Term Personnel Less Satisfied With Military Life Than Those in Mid-Career

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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

December 7, 2001

The Honorable John M. McHugh
Chairman
The Honorable Vic Snyder
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Military Personnel
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

Identifying and retaining the right mix of highly skilled personnel are top priorities for the Department of Defense (DOD). While the military services report that they are generally meeting their goals for the retention of aggregate numbers of personnel, measuring retention based on aggregate numbers potentially masks variations in retention by specific career stages and pay grades and only partially measures DOD's ability to retain adequate numbers of qualified personnel. DOD remains concerned about retention of personnel who are nearing the end of their first term and personnel in key mid-career stages.

Congress has sought reliable information about the quality of life of servicemembers, and it is generally believed that satisfaction with military life is a factor in retaining the people needed. In response to your request for this information, we analyzed data from DOD's broad-based 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel. Specifically, we examined survey data on first-term enlisted personnel—those in their initial term of enlistment with less than 6 years of service—as well as both enlisted personnel and officers in mid-career—which included those with less than 13 years of service that were not serving an initial enlistment or obligation. For these three groups, we analyzed survey responses to determine (1) overall satisfaction with military life and retention intentions, (2) initial reasons for joining the military and their relationship to servicemembers' intent to remain in the military, (3) reasons servicemembers cited for considering leaving active duty, and (4) perceptions of civilian life relative to military life. It is important to note that the economy has slowed and that the military has received significant pay raises since the survey was administered in 1999. And, the terrorist attacks on September 11th may have an impact on a servicemember's decision to stay in or leave the military. In response to the terrorist attacks and the subsequent military action, DOD authorized the services to enact stop-loss procedures, allowing the services to retain individuals on active duty beyond their date of separation, delaying planned retirements and discharges.

Briefing sections I-IV contain specific data and our observations on the servicemembers' responses to the survey.

Results in Brief

Satisfaction with military life and retention intent increase as personnel gain seniority. First-term enlisted personnel were more dissatisfied (41 percent) than satisfied (35 percent) with the overall military way of life. In addition, only 29 percent of first-term enlisted personnel reported that they were likely to stay on active duty, and relatively few (14 percent) reported that they envisioned serving a 20-year career. However, mid-career personnel were more satisfied than dissatisfied with the military way of life. More specifically, 52 percent of mid-career enlisted personnel and 62 percent of mid-career officers were satisfied, while only 23 percent and 20 percent, respectively, were dissatisfied. In addition, both mid-career enlisted personnel and officers reported that they were more likely than unlikely to stay on active duty (62 percent and 63 percent, respectively). And, mid-career enlisted personnel and officers reported that they were more likely than unlikely to serve 20 years (63 percent and 66 percent, respectively).

Retention intent is related to the reasons that first-term and mid-career personnel joined the military. Among the top reasons that first-term enlisted personnel cited for joining were education benefits (43 percent) and training for civilian employment (18 percent). Those who cited these reasons indicated that they were less likely to stay on active duty than those who entered for other reasons, such as personal growth or travel and experiences. This is understandable because personnel often leave active duty to use their education benefits, such as the Montgomery GI Bill, or to take full-time civilian employment. For mid-career personnel, the desire to serve their country emerged as one of the top reasons for joining, and these personnel reported that they were more likely to serve 20 years than those who entered the military for other reasons. Mid-career enlisted personnel that joined for education benefits and mid-career officers that joined for training for a specific occupation—reasons that allow personnel to potentially transfer a skill gained in the military to the civilian sector—reported that they were more likely to leave the military.

Dissatisfaction with the military way of life is also related to reasons that personnel cited for leaving the military. On DOD's 1999 survey, active duty service personnel rated their satisfaction with 37 aspects of the military and identified which of the aspects were the most important reasons for leaving or considering leaving the military. The primary reasons servicemembers cited for leaving or considering leaving the military were

their basic pay, the amount of personal/family time, and the quality of leadership. While personnel that were dissatisfied with these three factors were generally less inclined to stay in the military than those that were satisfied, no single factor, alone, was a good predictor of retention intent. The best overall predictor of retention for first-term enlisted and mid-career personnel was overall satisfaction with the military way of life.

In 1999, military personnel perceived that many aspects of civilian life would be better than their experiences in the military. About 70 percent (or more for some aspects) of servicemembers believed that civilians were compensated better and had a better quality of life. Servicemembers did view some aspects of their military life more favorably relative to civilian life, including vacation time, sense of accomplishment and pride, and education and training opportunities. However, servicemembers' perceptions may have changed since the survey was administered in 1999 due to a slowing economy and significant recent pay raises.

Background

We have recently reported on several personnel issues based on the results of DOD's 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel. In March 2000, we testified on the preliminary results of the survey.¹ At that time, we reported that the retention decision was a complex, highly personal decision. Servicemembers base their decision to stay in or leave the military on their overall experiences, as well as their perceptions of military and civilian opportunities. DOD personnel have recently received pay and other allowance increases, which were requested by the Department to help retain its service personnel. However, across-the-board pay and allowance increases do little to address specific retention problems because these problems are often focused in certain occupations, career stages, and grades. In May 2001, we reported that increasing the housing allowance alone would do little to increase retention because, among other reasons, less than 1 percent of servicemembers cited housing allowances as a top reason to leave the military.² In June 2001, we reported that, based on their military experiences, enlisted personnel in retention-critical occupations did not intend to leave the military at a greater rate than did other enlisted personnel. However, to the extent that personnel possess marketable

¹ *Military Personnel: Preliminary Results of DOD's 1999 Survey of Active Duty Members* (GAO/T-NSIAD-00-110, Mar. 8, 2000).

² *Military Personnel: Higher Allowances Should Increase Use of Civilian Housing, but Not Retention* (GAO-01-684, May 31, 2001).

skills, they would be more likely to leave the military for more attractive civilian opportunities.³ Appendix I provides a summary of our recent reports based on the findings from DOD's 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel.

Any discussion of military retention must be put into the context of the way that the military seeks to shape its workforce. Basically, because the military needs a youthful, vigorous force, it has traditionally allowed only a small portion of enlistees to stay for a 20-year career. Historical data provided by DOD indicate that about 15 percent of a typical group of new enlistees and 47 percent of new officers continue in the military for a full 20-year career. DOD managers have access to a variety of workforce shaping and development tools for retaining the most qualified personnel. For example, the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980 provides part of the legislative framework for how DOD affects the shape of the force. This, in effect, creates an "up-or-out" system. Officers progress in a group determined by the year of their commissioning and largely compete for promotion to the next higher grade with other members of the group at set points based on years of service. Also, after a certain number of years and depending on their grades, officers twice passed over for promotion are to be separated from active service or retired, if eligible. In addition, the act specifies the number of officers allowed in upper grades.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Office of the Secretary of Defense for comment. The Department concurred with our report. The Department noted that servicemembers' retention intent can change over time and that retention intent and actual retention behavior are imperfectly correlated. The Department's comments appear in appendix II.

Scope and Methodology

The data used in this briefing report were derived from DOD's 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel, which we worked with the Department to design. It was mailed in the fall of 1999 to a stratified random sample of over 66,000 uniformed personnel. DOD provided the final survey data to us in late 2000.

³ *Military Personnel: Perceptions of Retention-Critical Personnel Are Similar to Those of Other Enlisted Personnel* (GAO-01-785, June 28, 2001).

Definition of Target Population

To determine the satisfaction and retention intentions of first-term enlisted personnel, mid-career enlisted personnel, and mid-career officers, we had to define our target populations. We defined first-term enlisted personnel as servicemembers in their first term of enlistment that had served between 0 and 6 years of service and that were in the E-1 through E-5 pay grades. Mid-career enlisted personnel included servicemembers in the E-5 through E-7 pay grades with less than 13 years of service that were not serving an initial enlistment. Mid-career officers included servicemembers in the O-3 and O-4 pay grades with less than 13 years of service that were not serving an initial obligation. For mid-career officers, we eliminated personnel that had received their rank due to a special appointment based on their occupation (e.g., legal officer, chaplains, physicians, dentists, nurses, and veterinarians).

Development of DOD's Survey of Active Duty Personnel

DOD periodically surveys active duty servicemembers about their opinions of the military way of life; prior to 1999, the survey was last administered in 1992. When the Department learned that the Subcommittee on Military Personnel had asked us to administer a separate survey to military personnel, the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy) offered us the opportunity to include questions on the survey DOD was planning to administer. We worked with DOD staff to refine the survey and address additional aspects. The survey was pretested and refined at Navy bases around Jacksonville, Florida; Pope Air Force Base, Fayetteville, North Carolina; and the U.S. Marine base at Quantico, Virginia. Time constraints prevented additional pretesting with Army and Coast Guard personnel beyond that performed by DOD on an earlier version of the survey.

Construction of Sample Respondents to Survey

The sample of 66,040 military members was drawn from a May 1999 population of 1,419,269 active duty DOD and U.S. Coast Guard personnel that were below the rank of admiral or general and had at least 6 months of service. The sample was stratified on five variables: service; pay grade; gender; location (i.e., inside or outside the continental United States); and marital status. DOD survey experts used response rates from prior surveys to adjust the sample for groups with differing expected rates of survey completion. Also, the sample was designed to provide varying levels of precision for numerous subgroups (e.g., ± 3 percentage points for each service or pay grade group and ± 5 percentage points for senior officers in the Army). All findings presented in this report have a margin of error of ± 6 percentage points, or less.

Survey Administration

As of January 2000, DOD had received 37,119 surveys with at least some questions answered. Some surveys were eliminated because they (1) had been returned blank, (2) were duplicates from the same individual, or (3) came from respondents that had left active duty before the fielding period ended. The unweighted response rate was 56.2 percent. After eliminating people that were ineligible to participate in the survey, DOD computed a weighted response rate of 51 percent. DOD used a contractor to administer the survey. We did not test the contractor's procedures or validate the data provided to us. We did review the quality control procedures of DOD and its contractor for a similar large survey.

Weighting Responses

We weighted data to proportionally represent the target population. The weights reflected (1) the probability of selection for that member, (2) an adjustment for nonrespondents to minimize bias arising among demographic subgroups, and (3) a post-stratification factor for September 1999—the month in which the questionnaire was first distributed.

In recent years, response rates on both military and civilian surveys have decreased. Although weighting can adjust for differing response rates within the sampling cells, it cannot adjust for possible differences between those that did and did not respond to a survey. As with most surveys, there is an implicit assumption that nonrespondents would have answered like respondents. There is some risk of nonresponse bias, but it is not feasible to test for this bias. It should be recognized that the active duty survey is the only source of DOD-wide information for many issues, and it is far more reliable than anecdotal information or information generated by smaller, nonrepresentative samples.

We performed our work between July and November 2001 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; and the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness. Copies will also be provided to other interested parties upon request.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-5559. An additional GAO contact and staff acknowledgments are listed in appendix III.

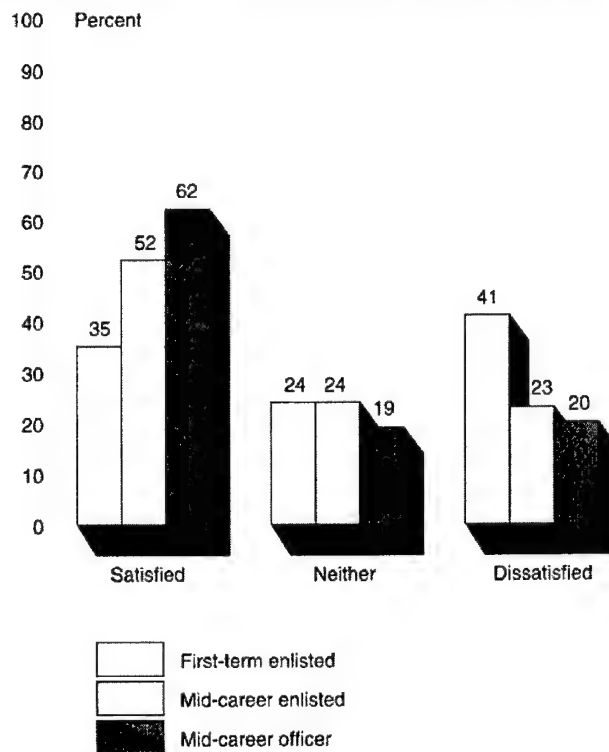


Derek B. Stewart
Director
Defense Capabilities and Management

Briefing Section I: Overall Satisfaction With Military Life and Retention Intentions



Overall Satisfaction With Military Way of Life



Note: Percentages may not add due to rounding.

Source: Responses to the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel.

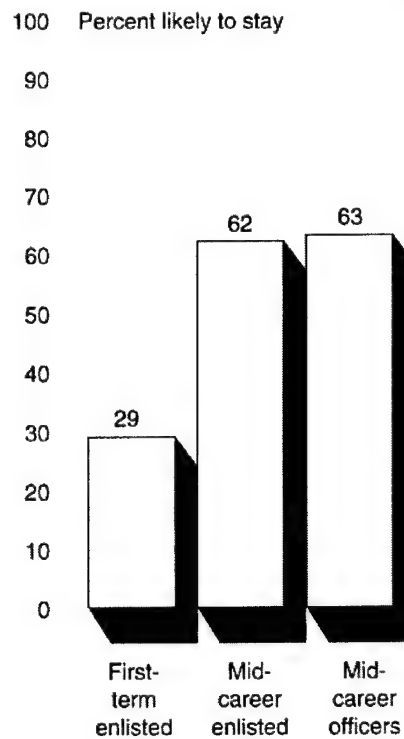
**Briefing Section I: Overall Satisfaction With
Military Life and Retention Intentions**

On the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel, more first-term enlisted personnel reported that they were dissatisfied (41 percent) than satisfied (35 percent) with the military way of life. More mid-career enlisted personnel and officers reported that they were satisfied than dissatisfied. Fifty-two percent of mid-career enlisted personnel and 62 percent of mid-career officers reported that they were satisfied, while 23 percent and 20 percent, respectively, indicated that they were dissatisfied.

Briefing Section I: Overall Satisfaction With
Military Life and Retention Intentions



Likelihood of Staying at the End of
Term/Obligation



Source: Responses to the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel.

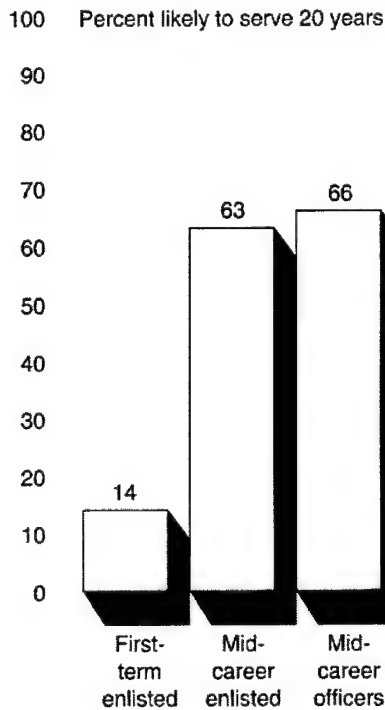
**Briefing Section I: Overall Satisfaction With
Military Life and Retention Intentions**

One survey question asked servicemembers their likelihood of staying on active duty in the military if they had to decide at the time that they were completing the survey. Sixty-two percent of mid-career enlisted personnel and 63 percent of officers reported that they were likely to stay on active duty; in contrast, 29 percent of first-term enlisted personnel reported that they were likely to stay on active duty at the end of their current term.

Briefing Section I: Overall Satisfaction With
Military Life and Retention Intentions



Likelihood to Serve 20 Years on Active
Duty



Source: Responses to the 1999 Survey of Active Duty.

**Briefing Section I: Overall Satisfaction With
Military Life and Retention Intentions**

Another survey question asked military members to write in how many years they plan to serve. Almost two-thirds of mid-career personnel reported that they planned to serve 20 years or more, and about 14 percent of first-term enlisted personnel reported that they planned to serve 20 years. Both measures of retention, including likelihood of staying on active duty and of serving 20 years, must be put into context with the way the Department of Defense (DOD) shapes its force. In effect, DOD aims to keep successively smaller portions of personnel each year. According to DOD actuarial records, about 15 percent of a typical group of new enlisted personnel and 47 percent of officers serve 20 years on active duty.

Briefing Section II: Relationship of Servicemembers' Initial Reasons for Joining the Military to Retention Intent

Table 1: Most Frequently Cited Reasons for Joining the Military

First-term enlisted	Mid-career enlisted	Mid-career officers
1. Education benefits (43%)	1. Education benefits (23%)	1. Serve country (39%)
2. Training for civilian employment (18%)	2. Serve country (19%)	2. Education benefits (25%)
3. Travel and experiences (18%)	3. Travel and experiences (19%)	3. Challenging work (23%)
4. Personal growth (15%)	4. Job security (15%)	4. Attracted to the military (16%)
5. Figure what to do (14%)	5. Get away (14%)	5. Specific occupation (16%)

Note: The percentages add to more than 100 because we combined percentages for servicemembers' responses to their most important and second most important reasons for joining the military.

Source: Responses to the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel.

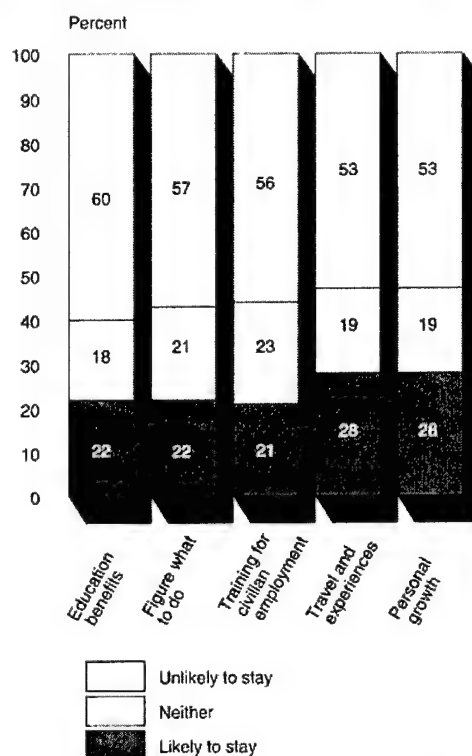
On the survey, respondents were asked to identify, from a list of 21 reasons, their 2 most important reasons for joining the military. We combined the responses to determine the five reasons most frequently cited for joining the military. First-term and mid-career enlisted personnel most frequently indicated that they had joined the military for education benefits. The military's primary program of financial aid for education is the Montgomery GI Bill. Unless they choose to withdraw from this program, all eligible active duty military personnel are automatically enrolled in the Montgomery GI Bill. Slightly more than half of the servicemembers that contribute money to the program actually take advantage of the benefits after they leave the military, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mid-career officers recalled entering active duty for different reasons. Overall, 39 percent reported that they had joined the military because of a desire to serve their country. Two other reasons most frequently cited by mid-career officers were education benefits (25 percent) and challenging or interesting work (23 percent).

**Briefing Section II: Relationship of
Servicemembers' Initial Reasons for Joining
the Military to Retention Intent**



**Reasons to Join in Relation to Intent to
Stay: First-Term Enlisted**



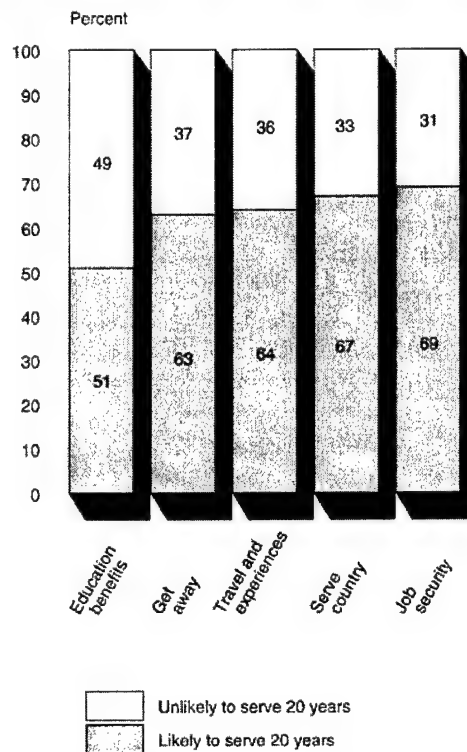
Source: Responses to the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel.

First-term enlisted personnel's reasons for joining the military appear to be related to the likelihood that they would stay in or leave active duty. Those that entered for education benefits tended to be less likely to stay on active duty than those that entered for other reasons. Specifically, 60 percent of first-term enlisted personnel that entered active duty for education benefits were unlikely to stay.

**Briefing Section II: Relationship of
Servicemembers' Initial Reasons for Joining
the Military to Retention Intent**



**Reasons to Join in Relation to Intent to
Serve 20 Years: Mid-Career Enlisted**



Source: Responses to the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel.

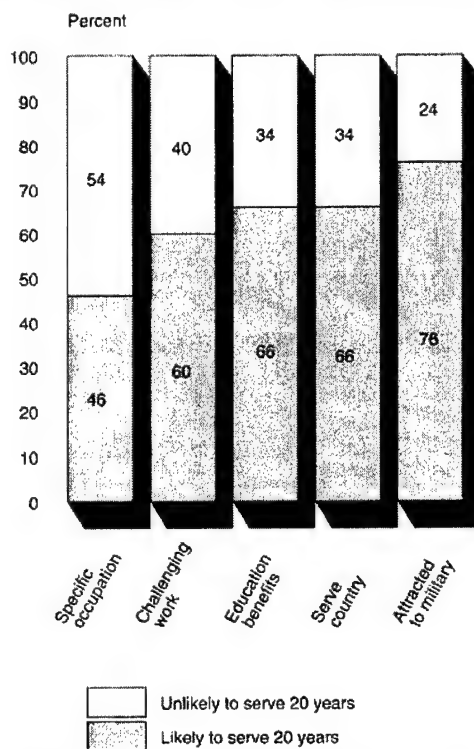
**Briefing Section II: Relationship of
Servicemembers' Initial Reasons for Joining
the Military to Retention Intent**

Mid-career personnel's reasons for joining the military appear to be related to the likelihood that they would stay for 20 years. Those that entered for education benefits were less likely to indicate that they intend to serve 20 years than those that joined for other reasons. A little over half (51 percent) of mid-career enlisted personnel that joined the military for education benefits said they were likely to serve 20 years. And, a lower percentage of mid-career enlisted personnel that reported entering active duty for education benefits indicated they were likely to serve 20 years than the overall percentage of mid-career enlisted personnel that reported that they would be likely to serve 20 years on active duty (63 percent).

Briefing Section II: Relationship of
Servicemembers' Initial Reasons for Joining
the Military to Retention Intent



Reasons to Join in Relation to Intent to
Serve 20 Years: Mid-Career Officers



Source: Responses to the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel.

**Briefing Section II: Relationship of
Servicemembers' Initial Reasons for Joining
the Military to Retention Intent**

For mid-career enlisted personnel, reasons for joining the military appear to be related to the likelihood that mid-career officers would stay for 20 years. For example, those that reported joining for the opportunity to work in a specific occupation were less likely to intend to serve 20 years than those that joined for other top reasons. Only 46 percent of mid-career officers that reported joining for the opportunity to work in a specific occupation said they were likely to serve 20 years. In addition, a lower percentage of mid-career officers that reported joining for this reason indicated they were likely to serve 20 years than the overall percentage of mid-career officers that reported that they would be likely to serve 20 years on active duty (66 percent).

Briefing Section III: Reasons Cited for Leaving the Military

Table 2: Most Frequently Cited Reasons for Leaving or Considering Leaving the Military

First-term enlisted	Mid-career enlisted	Mid-career officers
1. Basic pay (45%)	1. Basic pay (41%)	1. Amount of personal and family time (24%)
2. Amount of personal and family time (17%)	2. Retirement pay (19%)	2. Basic pay (23%)
3. Quality of leadership (17%)	3. Amount of personal and family time (15%)	3. Job enjoyment (17%)
4. Job enjoyment (15%)	4. Quality of leadership (13%)	4. Quality of leadership (17%)
5. Deployments (10%)	5. Pace of promotions (13%)	5. Retirement pay (15%)

Note: The percentages add to more than 100 because we combined percentages for servicemembers' responses to their most important and second most important reasons for leaving the military.

Source: Responses to the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel.

The 1999 survey asked active duty respondents to rate 37 aspects of military life on a scale from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. Respondents were also asked to identify which of the 37 aspects were their most and second most important reasons for leaving or considering leaving the military. We combined these reasons to determine servicemembers' top five most frequently cited reasons for leaving or considering leaving active duty.

First-term and mid-career enlisted personnel most often cited basic pay as the most important reason for leaving or considering leaving the military. About the same percentages of first-term (45 percent) and mid-career enlisted personnel (41 percent) responded that basic pay was the top reason to leave the military. For mid-career officers, amount of personal and family time (24 percent) was cited as the most important reason for leaving or considering leaving the military. However, basic pay was also among the top reasons for leaving or considering leaving the military, cited by 23 percent of the officers.

In addition to determining the top five reasons for leaving or considering leaving the military, we determined how individual aspects of military life related to retention intent. We found that no single aspect, alone, was a good predictor of retention. Thus, it should not be concluded that pay, alone, is causing members to leave. Overall, basic pay was cited as a top

**Briefing Section III: Reasons Cited for
Leaving the Military**

reason to leave, but it was also cited by servicemembers as a top reason to stay.¹

The best predictor of retention for first-term enlisted and mid-career personnel was overall satisfaction with the military way of life. DOD noted a similar finding in its analysis of the previous active duty survey, administered in 1992. At that time, DOD reported that overall satisfaction with the military way of life had the strongest association with career intentions of any of the explanatory variables tested from the survey.²

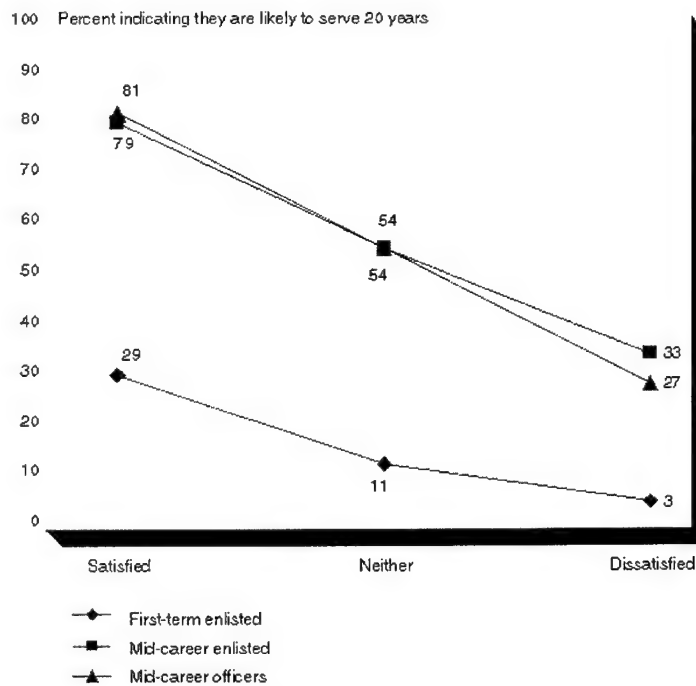
¹ *Military Personnel: Preliminary Results of DOD's 1999 Survey of Active Duty Members* (GAO/T-NSIAD-00-110, Mar. 8, 2000).

² *The Military as a Career: Results from the 1992 DOD Surveys of Officers and Enlisted Personnel and Military Spouses* (Defense Manpower Data Center Report No. 97-006).

Briefing Section III: Reasons Cited for
Leaving the Military



Satisfaction With Military Life in Relation to Retention
Intentions of Personnel: Percent Likely to Serve 20 Years



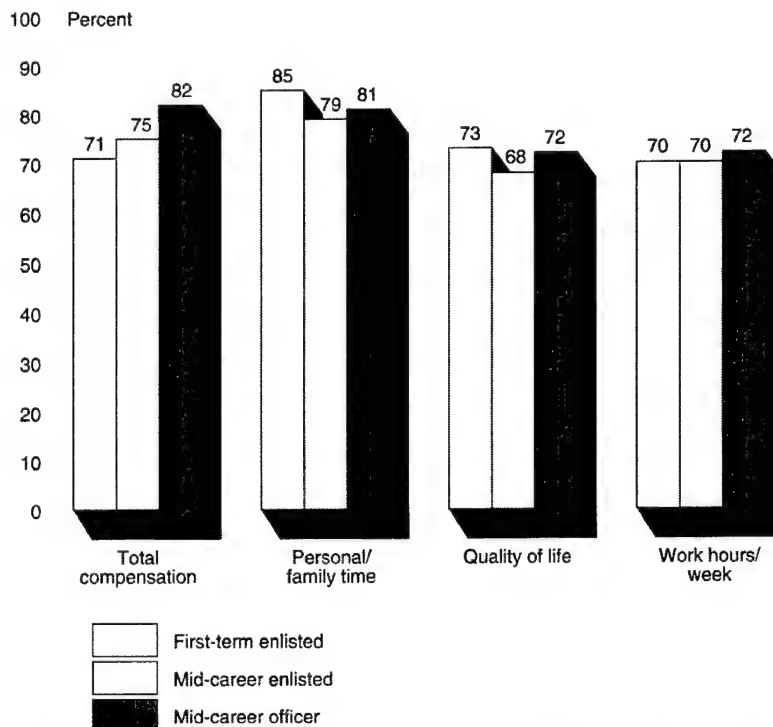
Source: Responses to the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel.

We determined that members of the three groups that were satisfied with the overall military way of life were more likely to serve 20 years on active duty service than those that were dissatisfied. First-term enlisted personnel that reported that they were satisfied with the overall military way of life were more likely to serve 20 years (29 percent) than those that were dissatisfied (3 percent). According to the survey, mid-career personnel, both enlisted and officers, were significantly more likely to intend to serve 20 years on active duty than were first-term enlisted personnel, and their intention to stay was linked to overall satisfaction with military life. Almost 80 percent of mid-career enlisted personnel that were satisfied with the overall military way of life reported that they were likely to serve 20 years, compared to 33 percent of those that were dissatisfied. Mid-career officers that were satisfied with the overall military way of life reported that they were much more likely to serve 20 years (81 percent) than those that were dissatisfied (27 percent).

Briefing Section IV: Servicemembers' Perceptions of Civilian Life Relative to Military Life



Perceptions that Civilian Life Is Better Than Military Life



Source: Responses to the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel.

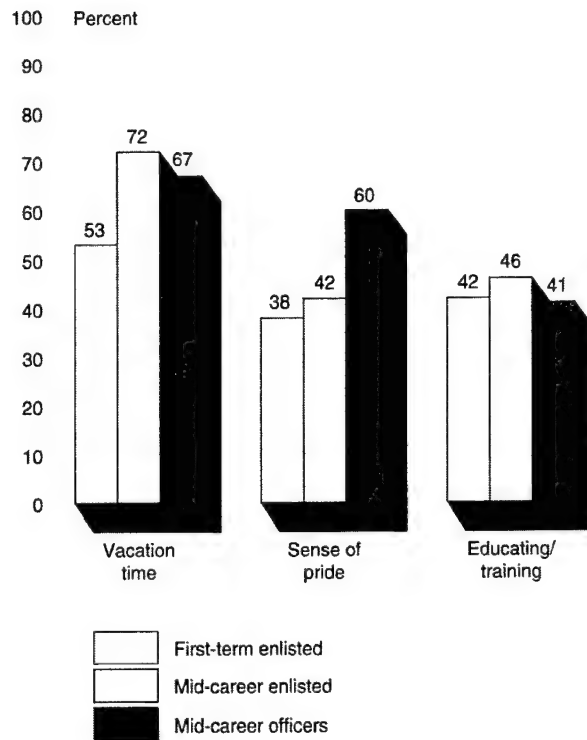
**Briefing Section IV: Servicemembers'
Perceptions of Civilian Life Relative to
Military Life**

In 1999, when the survey was administered, first-term and mid-career enlisted personnel and mid-career officers generally perceived opportunities in civilian life more favorably than those in military life. When asked to rate compensation and quality of life issues on the survey, personnel in each group overwhelmingly perceived civilian opportunities as being better on 4 of 10 factors. Around 70 percent or more of each of the three groups believed that civilian (1) total compensation, (2) personal/family time, (3) quality of life, and (4) hours worked per week were better than those offered by the military. However, servicemembers' perceptions may have changed since the survey was administered in 1999 due to a slowing economy and significant recent pay raises.

Briefing Section IV: Servicemembers'
Perceptions of Civilian Life Relative to
Military Life



Perceptions That Military Life Is Better
Than Civilian Life



Source: Responses to the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel.

**Briefing Section IV: Servicemembers'
Perceptions of Civilian Life Relative to
Military Life**

Even during the strong economy of the late 1990s, first-term and mid-career enlisted personnel and mid-career officers perceived three types of opportunities as more favorable in the military than in civilian life. These aspects were vacation time, a sense of accomplishment and pride, and education and training opportunities.

Appendix I: Recent Reports Concerning DOD's 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel

We have recently issued several reports on the findings from the 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel in relation to retention. DOD and Congress have expressed concern with the ability to attract and retain high-quality personnel and have sought information on this issue. Table 3 provides a summary of our reports that address military retention issues based on results from the survey.

Table 3: Recent Reports Concerning DOD's 1999 Survey of Active Duty Personnel

Title	Findings
<i>Military Personnel: Longer Time Between Moves Related to Higher Satisfaction and Retention</i> (GAO-01-841, Aug. 3, 2001)	In August 2001, we reported that the time between permanent change of station moves (i.e., moves of their families and household goods) was related to satisfaction and retention intent. Personnel with shorter times between moves were less likely to be satisfied with the military way of life. Also, the shorter the average time between moves, the more likely the member's spouse or significant other was to favor the member leaving the military.
<i>Military Personnel: Perceptions of Retention-Critical Personnel are Similar to Those of Other Enlisted Personnel</i> (GAO-01-785, June 28, 2001)	In June 2001, we reported that personnel in retention-critical occupations were not being "pushed out" of the military at a greater rate than were other enlisted personnel. Rather, to the extent that they possess marketable skills, these personnel are more likely to leave the military for more attractive civilian opportunities.
<i>Military Personnel: Higher Allowances Should Increase Use of Civilian Housing, but Not Retention</i> (GAO-01-684, May 31, 2001)	In May 2001, we reported that DOD could not expect a substantial increase in retention based solely on increasing housing allowances. Because less than 1 percent of personnel surveyed cited housing and housing allowances as a reason for leaving or considering leaving the military, increasing housing allowances would not have a significant impact on retention.
<i>Military Personnel: Full Extent of Support to Civil Authorities Unknown but Unlikely to Adversely Impact Retention</i> (GAO-01-9, Jan. 26, 2001)	In January 2001, we reported that providing assistance to civil authorities did not appear to affect retention negatively and that overall, retention had remained relatively stable over the last decade. A discussion with select military units with high deployment rates and frequent participation in support to civil entities indicated that assignments that involved support to civil authorities had very little impact on retention.
<i>Military Personnel: Preliminary Results of DOD's 1999 Survey of Active Duty Members</i> (GAO/T-NSIAD-00-110, Mar. 8, 2000)	In March 2000, we reported that various aspects of military life interact to determine servicemembers' decisions to stay in or leave the military. The retention decision is complex and highly personal, and servicemembers use a summation of their own individual experiences, their perceptions of military and civilian opportunities, and their overall personal and family well-being when deciding whether to stay in or leave the military.

Appendix II: Comments From the Department of Defense



FORCE MANAGEMENT
POLICY

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

DEC 5 2001



Mr. Derek B. Stewart
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Stewart:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, "MILITARY PERSONNEL: First Term Personnel Less Satisfied with Military Life than those in Mid-Career," October 29, 2001 (GAO Code 350102).

The Department concurs with the GAO draft report. However, it is important to note that one's retention intent is subject to change over time; moreover, there is an imperfect correlation between stated intent and actual retention behavior.

The Department appreciates the GAO's interest in factors affecting retention decisions. The report will assist the Department in its efforts to effectively and efficiently man its military forces.

Sincerely,


Charles S. Abell



Appendix III: Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

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Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, William Beusse, Jack Edwards, Aisha Mahmood, Matthew Ullengren, and Kristy Williams made important contributions to this report.

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